

## Message Text

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TO SECSTATE WASHDC 3239

INFO AMCONSUL MARSEILLE

AMCONSUL NICE

AMCONSUL STRASBOURG

AMCONSUL LYON

AMCONSUL BORDEAUX

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 PARIS 24059

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT FR

SUBJECT: PRIME MINISTER JACQUES CHIRAC--CURRENTLY

FRANCE'S HOTTEST POLITICAL PROPERTY

SUMMARY: JACQUES CHIRAC HAS EXPLOITED HIS POSITION AS PRIME MINISTER TO DEVELOP AN INDEPENDENT IMAGE AS A POTENTIAL PRESIDENT OF FRANCE. HE HAS ALSO ENHANCED HIS POWER BY MASTERING THE COMPLEXITIES OF GOVERNMENT AND BY TAKING OVER AND REVITALIZING THE UDR PARTY. IF GISCARD REMAINS IN OFFICE A FULL SEVEN YEARS, HE WILL NEED CHIRAC TO KEEP THE GOVERNMENT DYNAMIC AND RESPONSIVE, THUS SETTING UP CHIRAC AS A LOGICAL SUCCESSOR. IF HE FIRES CHIRAC, HE WILL BE CREATING A FORMIDABLE OPPONENT. IF GISCARD LEAVES OFFICE PREMATURELY BECAUSE OF POSSIBLE BREAKDOWN IN POLITICAL STABILITY, CHIRAC'S POSITION IS SUFFICIENTLY DETACHED FROM GISCARD'S AS TO MAKE HIM A CONCEIVABLE ALTERNATIVE IN COMPETITION WITH THE SOCIALIST /COMMUNIST LEFT COALITION. END SUMMARY.

1. PRIME MINISTER CHIRAC'S APPOINTMENT OF JEROME MONOD AS HIS NEW CABINET DIRECTOR RECENTLY IS A SIGNIFICANT POINT OF DEPARTURE FOR AN ANALYSIS OF THE POWER AND  
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POTENTIAL OF FRANCE'S CHIEF OF GOVERNMENT. MONOD'S

APPOINTMENT IS SIGNIFICANT FOR TWO REASONS. FIRST, HE IS ONE OF THE CAREER CIVIL SERVICE'S MOST OUTSTANDING PERFORMERS. PEOPLE LIKE MONOD DO NOT JOIN TEAMS THAT ARE NOT LIKELY TO BE PENNANT WINNERS. SECONDLY, IN HIS MOST RECENT JOB, MONOD WAS IN CHARGE OF DISTRIBUTING CASH GRANTS TO FRANCE'S LOCAL GOVERNMENTS. IN SHORT, HE IS MR. PATRONAGE, AND BY CO-OPTING HIM CHIRAC HAS ESTABLISHED HIS OWN CHANNELS TO FRANCE'S GRASS ROOTS WHICH BYPASS BOTH THE PARLIAMENT AND THE POLITICAL PARTIES.

2. THE APPOINTMENT OF MONOD IS NOT AN ISOLATED ACT OF POLITICAL ASTUTENESS ON CHIRAC'S PART. LOOKING BACK AT HIS FIRST 15 MONTHS IN OFFICE, WE SEE NOTHING BUT AN UNFAILING ABILITY TO CAPITALIZE ON OPPORTUNITIES AND TO AVOID PITFALLS. BEFORE HE BECAME PRIME MINISTER IN MAY 1974, CHIRAC WAS KNOWN AS A HARD CHARGER IN THE CONCEPTION AND EXECUTION OF POLICY, BOTH AS MINISTER OF AGRICULTURE AND MINISTER OF INTERIOR. AS HEAD OF GOVERNMENT, HE HAS BECOME THE MAN WHO ALSO AMASSES POLITICAL POWER IN VIRTUALLY EVERY ADMINISTRATIVE ACT. HOW HAS HE DONE IT, AND WHERE IS HE GOING?

A. HEADING THE LIST OF ATTRIBUTES IS CHIRAC'S PHENOMENAL ENERGY AND BRAIN POWER IN GRASPING THE POLITICAL DIMENSION OF PROBLEMS AND SITUATIONS. HE IS THE PRIME MINISTER WHO CANNOT BE SNOWED BECAUSE HE MASTERS ALL THE DOSSIERS AS WELL AS OR BETTER THAN MOST OF THE INDIVIDUAL MINISTERS. AT GISCARD'S WEEKLY CABINET MEETINGS, CHIRAC HAS COGENT COMMENTS ON EVERYBODY'S PRESENTATION. WHEN HE DISAGREES WITH ANOTHER MINISTER AT THE WEEKLY MEETING, GISCARD OFTEN UPHOLDS CHIRAC. WHEN CHIRAC LOSES, SUBSEQUENT EVENTS OFTEN PROVE HIM RIGHT. LAST MARCH, FOR EXAMPLE, GISCARD CALLED A CABINET WEEKEND POLICY SEMINAR AT THE PRESIDENT'S RAMBOUILLET COUNTRY ESTATE. CHIRAC AND FINANCE MINISTER FOURCADE VENTED A MAJOR DISAGREEMENT ABOUT THE TIMING OF REFLATIONARY MEASURES. CHIRAC ARGUED FOR ACTION BEFORE THE SUMMER. FOURCADE ARGUED FOR DELAY UNTIL THE FALL, AND WAS UPHELD. CHIRAC CLEVERLY ARRANGED FOR THE FACT OF THE DISAGREEMENT TO BE LEAKED TO TRUSTED FRIENDS IN THE PRESS. WHEN THE PRESI-

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DENT'S ECONOMIC REFLATION PROGRAM WAS ANNOUNCED FOR THE FALL, HE WAS SOUNDLY CRITICIZED FOR ACTING TOO LATE.

B. CHIRAC HAS EXCELLENT INSTINCTS ABOUT NO-WIN SITUATIONS. HE SEES THEM COMING, AND MANAGES TO AVOID THEM. HE HAS STAYED COMPLETELY ALOOF FROM THE CORSICA AUTONOMIST PROBLEM, FOR EXAMPLE, AND HAS ALLOWED INTERIOR MINISTER PONIATOWSKI TO TAKE THE BLAME FOR THE VIOLENCE.

WHEN CHIRAC STAYS ALOOF FROM A SITUATION, IT IS A CON-  
SCIOUS POLITICAL ACT, BECAUSE AS AN ACTIVIST HE NORMALLY  
GETS INVOLVED IN EVERYTHING.

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C. AS PRIME MINISTER, CHIRAC HAS HAD AN OPPORTUNITY  
TO DEVELOP FOREIGN POLICY CREDENTIALS BECAUSE HE IS CON-  
STANTLY INVITED TO MAKE OFFICIAL VISITS TO OTHER COUN-  
TRIES. HE EXPLOITS THESE VISITS THROUGH EXCELLENT  
MANIPULATION OF ACCOMPANYING PRESS AND BY MASTERING ALL  
THE DETAILS.

D. GOVERNMENT INVOLVEMENT IN PROBLEMS AFFECTING  
SIGNIFICANT GROUPS OF VOTERS INVARIABLY TAKES THE FORM OF  
CHIRAC MAKING THE MOST IMPORTANT PUBLIC DECLARATIONS AT  
THE EXPENSE OF THE MINISTER SPECIFICALLY RESPONSIBLE FOR  
THE DOSSIER. DEFENSE OF THE SOUTHERN VINEYARD OWNERS  
AGAINST CHEAP ITALIAN IMPORTS IS CHIRAC'S CRUSADE, AS WAS  
THE FIGHT AGAINST "AMERICAN TECHNOLOGICAL IMPERIALISM"  
IN THE F-104 REPLACEMENT COMPETITION.

E. CHIRAC'S POWER PLAY LAST DECEMBER WHICH GAVE HIM ABSOLUTE CONTROL OF THE GAULLIST UDR PARTY, THE LARGEST PARLIAMENTARY GROUPING, WAS A MASTERPIECE OF POLITICAL MANEUVER AND TIMING. HE NOW HAS A POLITICAL AS WELL AS CONFIDENTIAL

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AN ADMINISTRATIVE VEHICLE FOR AMASSING MORE POWER.

F. CHIRAC HAS HANDLED BRILLIANTLY THE VISIBLE ASPECTS OF HIS RELATIONSHIP WITH PRESIDENT GISCARD D'ESTAING. WHENEVER HE HAS THE OPPORTUNITY, IN PUBLIC OR IN PRIVATE, CHIRAC POINTS OUT THAT GISCARD CAN FIRE HIM ANYTIME AT A MOMENT'S NOTICE. IT IS THEREFORE RIDICULOUS, ACCORDING TO CHIRAC, FOR ANYONE TO SAY THAT HE HAS INDEPENDENT POWER. AS A RESULT, NOBODY IN GISCARD'S ENTOURAGE CAN ACCUSE CHIRAC OF DISLOYALTY, AND WE DOUBT THAT CHIRAC WILL DO ANYTHING IN THE FUTURE TO INVITE SUCH A CHARGE. THIS TACTIC NOT ONLY UNDERCUTS HIS ENEMIES IN THE ELYSEE, BUT VIRTUALLY FORCES GISCARD TO DEMONSTRATE REVERSE LOYALTY. CHIRAC ALSO DRAWS HEAVILY ON HIS YOUTH. AT 42 HE KNOWS THAT HE NEED NOT BE IN A HURRY. HE HAS TIME TO STRENGTHEN HIS IMAGE, AND PLAYING BY THE RULES OF THE FIFTH REPUBLIC IS THE QUICKEST WAY TO GET WHERE HE WANTS TO GO.

G. FINALLY, IN A PERIOD WHEN THE POLITICAL CLASS IS IDENTIFYING VERY FEW INDIVIDUALS WITH PRESIDENTIAL STATURE, CHIRAC STANDS OUT. LIKE HIM OR NOT, MORE AND MORE FRENCHMEN SEE CHIRAC AS A POTENTIAL CHIEF OF STATE. ASSOCIATED WITH THIS IMAGE IS THE ONE OF CHIRAC AS THE ANTI-IDEOLOGIST--THE 42 YEAR-OLD REPRESENTATIVE OF THE NEW GENERATION WHICH IS TIRED OF WORN OUT POLITICAL THEORIES. CHIRAC IS THE PROBLEM SOLVER WHO IS WILLING TO BORROW FROM LEFT IDEOLOGY AS WELL AS LIBERAL PHILOSOPHIES TO KEEP FRANCE STRONG, STABLE AND SOCIALLY PROGRESSIVE.

3. IT IS CLEAR THAT BECAUSE OF THE FACTORS DESCRIBED ABOVE, CHIRAC IS NOW STRONGER AND MORE FIRMLY BASED THAN HE WAS A YEAR AGO. WHAT ABOUT THE OUTLOOK FOR THE FUTURE? THE NEXT PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION, OF COURSE, IS SIX YEARS AWAY, AND A LOT CAN HAPPEN BETWEEN NOW AND THEN. BUT WE THINK CHIRAC IS IN A STRONG POSITION NEVERTHELESS. IN THE ABSENCE OF A MAJOR POLICY DISPUTE OR SERIOUS BLUNDER, GISCARD IS NOT LIKELY TO CHANGE PRIME MINISTERS BEFORE THE 1978 LEGISLATIVE ELECTIONS. CHIRAC IS NEEDED TO KEEP THE GOVERNMENT MACHINERY OPERATING IN A DYNAMIC FASHION, AND TO KEEP THE UDR PARTY DISCIPLINED  
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FOR THE 1978 ELECTIONS. IN ADDITION, THERE IS NOBODY IN

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GISCARD'S SMALL ENTOURAGE OF INDEPENDENT REPUBLICANS WHO HAS THE CREDIBILITY TO BE PRIME MINISTER. THE LONGER HE REMAINS PRIME MINISTER, THE STRONGER CHIRAC IS LIKELY TO BECOME.

4. CHIRAC'S POLITICAL POWER MUST ALSO BE VIEWED IN CONTEXT WITH THAT OF MICHEL PONIATOWSKI, MINISTER OF INTERIOR. DURING THE PAST MONTHS, THERE HAS BEEN SOME TALK IN LOCAL POLITICAL AND DIPLOMATIC CIRCLES OF A RIVALRY BETWEEN THE TWO. THIS RIVALRY, BOTH POLITICAL AND PERSONAL, HAS BEEN VIGOROUSLY AND PUBLICLY DENIED BY CHIRAC; BUT THE FACT IS THAT STAFF CLOSE TO BOTH MEN HAVE SUPPORTED THE RUMORS TO EMBASSY OFFICERS. CHIRAC HAS TO WORRY ABOUT PONIATOWSKI NOT AS A POTENTIAL RIVAL FOR THE

PRESIDENCY, BUT AS GISCARD'S POLITICAL STRATEGIST. IN SHORT, THE PONIATOWSKI THREAT TO CHIRAC IS PART AND PARCEL OF THE GISCARD THREAT. IN ANY SEPARATE SHOWDOWN BETWEEN CHIRAC AND PONIATOWSKI, WE WOULD EXPECT GISCARD TO END UP THE LOSER. CONSEQUENTLY, WE DO NOT EXPECT SUCH A SHOWDOWN TO OCCUR.

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5. THE ANALYSIS ABOVE IS BASED ON A HYPOTHESIS OF A POLITICALLY STABLE FRANCE THROUGHOUT GISCARD'S SEVEN-YEAR TERM. WE ALSO CANNOT EXCLUDE, AND MUST NECESSARILY THINK ABOUT, THE POSSIBILITY OF SEVERE INSTABILITY EQUIVALENT TO MAY 1968. IT IS IN CONTEMPLATION OF THIS CONTINGENCY THAT WE VIEW THE METEORIC RISE OF CHIRAC AS HAVING THE GREATEST SIGNIFICANCE. WITH HIS SEPARATE POLITICAL IDENTITY, HIS DYNAMIC PRESIDENTIAL IMAGE, HIS CONTROL OF A MAJOR PARTY WHICH SUPPORTS THE PRESIDENT BUT IS NOT BEHOLDEN TO THE PRESIDENT, AND HIS NON-IDEOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE, CHIRAC IS EMERGING AS A VISIBLE ALTERNATIVE TO GISCARD. THUS, IF GISCARD FALLS, AS DE GAULLE DID IN 1969, THE FRENCH VOTERS NEED NOT NECESSARILY TURN TO MITTERRAND AND HIS UNION OF THE LEFT. THEY CAN CONCEIVABLY TURN TO CHIRAC. VIEWED FROM THE OPTIC OF U.S. INTERESTS, THEREFORE, THE CHIRAC ALTERNATIVE IS OF SPECIAL SIGNIFICANCE.

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